

# Nation's top brass announce results of USS Cole investigation

By JO2 Michael Gloekler  
CNO Public Affairs

The Navy released the results of its Judge Advocate General Manual (JAGMAN) investigation of the terrorist bombing of USS Cole (DDG 67) during a combined Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) and Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) press conference held at the Pentagon today.

USS Cole suffered a terrorist attack last October 12, which killed 17 Sailors and injured 42 others while the ship was conducting a brief stop for fuel in Aden, Yemen.

The investigation provides a comprehensive account of the actions taken on board USS Cole before, during and after the attack. JAGMAN investigations provide the Navy an effective means to gather the facts about what happened, determine lessons learned to help prevent future such incidents, and assess accountability of those involved as appropriate.

Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Vern Clark, completed the JAGMAN and agreed with the findings of the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, Adm. Robert Natter, that the commanding officer of USS Cole, Cmdr. Kirk S. Lippold, acted reasonably in adjusting his force protection posture based on his assessment of the situation that presented itself when the ship arrived in Aden to refuel.

"I found Adm. Natter's analysis to be both well-reasoned and convincing," Clark said, "and therefore agreed with his determination that the facts do not warrant any punitive action against the commanding officer or other members of Cole's crew."

In assessing the accountability of the CO, the Navy needed to answer two questions: Were the decisions made and actions taken by the CO reasonable and within the range of performance expected of naval commanders; and, would any of the force protection measures not implemented by USS Cole have deterred or defeated this determined attack if they had been implemented.

The conclusion of Adm. Natter, agreed to and supported by both the CNO and Richard Danzig, Secretary of the Navy, is that the CO's decisions were reasonable and appropriate under the circumstances. The conclusion also states that even perfect implementation of all force protection measures specific under Threat Condition Bravo would not have prevented or deterred the attack.

The JAGMAN pointed out several lessons learned from the Cole attack, including a need for additional training and equipment, as well as a heightened awareness of force protection that would enable ships to operate within a reasonable level of risk in a high-threat environment.



U.S. Navy photo by Chief Photographer's Mate Johnny Wilson

Two tug boats gently push USS Cole (DDG 67) to Pier 4 of the Ingalls Shipyard in Pascagoula, Miss., on Dec. 24, 2000.

SECNAV's Task Force on Antiterrorism and Force Protection is already spearheading efforts to create a fundamentally improved force protection mindset throughout the Navy. The CNO also stressed the importance of having well-built ships, manned by well-trained crews as a key for survival either in conventional combat or against the asymmetrical threat of criminal terrorism.

The Navy's leadership also noted that the investigation underscored shortcomings throughout the network of commands, departments and agencies that provide support to U.S. Navy ships operating in foreign waters around the globe.

"The investigation clearly shows that the commanding officer of Cole did not have the specific intelligence, focused training, appropriate equipment or on-scene security support to effectively prevent or deter such a determined, preplanned assault on his ship," Clark said. "In short, the system — all of us — did not equip this skipper for success in the environment he encountered in Aden harbor that fateful day."

Secretary Danzig underscored the importance of a thorough assessment of accountability in his review of the JAGMAN investigation.

"We must account for why 17 people under our charge died, and why many other people, materiel and interests within our responsibility have been injured," Danzig said. "In the process, we cannot avoid our own responsibility for what the terrorists achieved. We owe it to those who suffer to provide the comfort of explanation, to the best of our abilities."

USS Cole is presently undergoing repairs at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Miss., and remains under the command of Cmdr. Lippold.